



An Early Christian Homerizon? Decoy, Direction, and Doxology

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Prolegomena

The task of detecting “Homeric horizons” within the texts, traditions, and practices of ancient Christianity poses a set of questions that exposes many of the working presuppositions of early Christian scholarship. These presuppositions or habits include assumptions regarding the social and education context of ancient Christian authors; the exclusivity, or not, of ethnic or religious identification, and the availability of Homer within the “world,” with all its manifold meanings, of formative Christianity. Such lines of questioning proceed aptly within the parameters of historical and literary scholarship. At times, however, they intertwine explicitly or implicitly with older, theologically informed concerns: for examples, variations on Tertullian’s query, “What does Athens have to do with Jerusalem?”; or anxieties about an affirmed “uniqueness” of the biblical text or the Christian worldview; or an insistence on the self-interpretability of the biblical canon¹—in its extreme form, why one should employ any text outside the Bible to interpret a text within the canon.

I raise these issues at the outset, not with the least promise of identifying the particular role that Homer or a Homeric horizon has played in each, or of sketching their full dimensions. Rather I mention them in order to give an impression of the landscape in which discussion of an early Christian Homeric horizon generally proceeds. I also do so in order to signal the sorts of matters that are variously at stake in these discussions. To shift the metaphor slightly, I want to indicate that such questions often contribute to the drifting fog banks that obscure or, rather,

¹ I note the striking similarities between this insistence and the supposed Aristarchan emphasis on elucidating “Homer from Homer.” See the discussion of this hermeneutical position in Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 3–6, 140–146, 226–227; James I. Porter, “Hermeneutical Lines and Circles: Aristarchus and Crates on the Exegesis of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes* (ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 67–114, especially 73–85.

redefine the “horizon.” Those who sail these waters regularly come to recognize, even to appreciate them, but they can be surprising aspects of this scholarly culture.

My focus in this paper is chiefly on Christian texts of the first century C.E. and their relation to practices of “doing Homer” available within the cultural repertoire of this time. The greater part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of a single first-century Christian text, one contained in the canon of the New Testament), the so-called Epistle to the Hebrews, which, as I shall argue, presents us with a particular way of “doing Homer.” It does so by drawing upon a given set of cultural strategies for appropriating Homer. In order to make this argument, however, I need first to distinguish the functions of Homeric horizons in critical scholarship of the New Testament and ancient Christianity. I would also point out that my concern here is not so much with the Christian literature of the third and fourth centuries C.E., for example, with the writings of Clement, Origen, or Basil of Caesarea. The uses and functions of Homer in their writings have been examined well,² and these authors present a different set of questions because of their explicit references to and quotations of Homer. Indeed, the propensity to regard Clement and Origen, in particular, as representing a first wave of Christian “scholarly” activity, with a more thorough engagement with the practices of Greek higher education in Alexandria, has meant that there has been inclination to look for a Homeric horizon in earlier Christian texts. In other words, earlier authors, especially those of the first century, are variously assumed (1) to have a less erudite Hellenistic education, (2) to be writing for an audience with experience of or interest in Hellenistic texts and traditions, and thus not be deploying Homer in their writings as a persuasive or apologetic technique, or (3) to occupy a privileged “religious” space, free from “contamination” from the surrounding cultures. This third assumption belongs to a certain mythic model of the formation of Christianity that posits pure origins, an original essence, and a devolution into a more syncretistic or assimilated form of religion. Again, this is a matter that I mention so that we understand one of the underlying narratives that has, until recently, influenced the study of early Christianity. All three assumptions, however, are buttressed by the observation that none of the New Testament texts quotes Homer, alludes to episodes in the Homeric poems, or explicitly mentions Homer as an ancient author. On the surface it would seem that they do not “know” Homer.

² See, for example, Jean Pépin, “The Platonic and Christian Ulysses,” in *Odysseus/Ulysses* (ed. Harold Bloom; New York and Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1991), 228–47; Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian: Neoplatonist Allegorical Reading and the Growth of the Epic Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 78–82. On later Christian theological appropriations of Homer, see Robert Browning, “The Byzantines and Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes* (ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney; Magie Classical Publications; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 134–48.

The growing tendency in recent decades to situate earliest Christianity as a Greco-Roman religion³ and to interpret its texts in relation not only to contemporary Jewish texts but also to other Hellenistic and Roman texts, rhetoric, and educational practices⁴ has challenged these assumptions. Sensitivity to the rhetorical strategies of both the epistolary corpus and the gospels suggests a “higher” style than previously admitted. A more nuanced understanding of the social, political, and economic location of various early Christian groups and authors, as well as the recognition of a Jewish context that was itself highly Hellenized, has shifted our suppositions about audiences’ experiences and interests. Lastly, the historically informed recognition of the diversity and multiplicity of Christian expression from the very beginning, arising as plural religious experiments in relation to numerous other religious and philosophical expressions, contradicts a notion of pure origins.⁵ These features all suggest that it is appropriate to consider again whether and how Christian texts of the first century might “know” Homer.

Homer as Bible: What a Comparison Produces

Within such an approach to the New Testament and early Christianity, the statement “Homer was the Bible of the ancients” functions axiomatically to establish a context of sacred narrative and textual interpretation in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. That is, this phrase constructs Homer in terms analogous to the role that Jewish and Christian scriptures play in defining and informing religious beliefs and culture. I would like to understand the explanatory and heuristic power of this widely used axiom. In particular, I would like to discern its role in shaping an understanding of the historical and religious context for the development of early Christianity. The use of this commonplace in such teaching and scholarship also raises the question of what is at stake in the act of comparison between Homer and the Bible.

To be clear, examining the identification of Homer as the “Bible of the Greeks” or “of the ancients” is a somewhat different act from the exploration of whether any ancient Christian

³ See, e.g., the inclusion of Christianity in Mary Beard, John North, and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* (2 vols.; Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴ Early landmarks in this approach include Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten* (1908; 4th edition; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1923); W. M. Ramsay, *The Church in the Roman Empire: Before A. D. 170* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1893); W. M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895); and Paul Wendland, *Die hellenistisch-römische Kultur in ihren Beziehungen zu Judentum und Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1912). The more recent resurgence of this approach was heralded by Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

⁵ See Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), English translation of *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1934); James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971); and Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

authors used Homer either to shape their writings on a literary level or as a basis of revelation. It is rather a matter of exploring a prior question, that is, what the valence of “Homer” is when it is brought into conversation with early Christian scholarship. The history of the axiom deserves a full study, beyond what I can do here. It would also be productive to consider at what point and under what circumstances it begins to function habitually in New Testament studies. I wish, however, to underscore its status as an intellectual commonplace, rather than as a position that argued and supported. That is, the statement functions metaphorically and evocatively.

A few examples are in order. The earliest use of the comparison that I have found is in Edward Gibbon’s *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* (published 1796). In recounting his early intellectual movement into classical studies, his decision to study Greek, and his choice of Homer as a starting point, Gibbon refers to Homer as “the father of poetry, and the Bible of the ancients.” He goes on, “After the first difficulties were surmounted, the language of nature and harmony soon became easy and familiar, and each day I sailed upon the ocean with a brisker gale and a more steady course.” After quoting *Iliad* 1.481–486, in which the wind fills the sails of the Achaean ships, he characterizes Homer as “a poet who has since become the most intimate of my friends.”⁶ This passage displays not only the use of Bible as a metaphor for Homer, but also a striking merging of Gibbon’s own experience with the words of Homer. In other words, he depicts his progress with learning Greek and reading Homer as an actualization of the Homeric text. Moreover, in naming Homer as “the poet who has since become the most intimate of my friends,” Gibbon utilizes language of deep familiarity and devotion, language that suggests a relationship akin to religious attachment and into which he has been initiated through his practices of reading and study.⁷

⁶ Edward Gibbon, *Memoirs of My Life and Writings* in *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon* (London: Strahan, Cadell, and Davies, 1796).

⁷ Gibbon’s memoir at this point shows remarkable similarity the conceptualization of experiencing Homer in the writings of the Second Sophistic and particularly in Philostratus’s *Heroikos*. Here the Phoenician merchant relates to the vinedresser a dream that he had shortly before arriving at the cult sanctuary of the hero Protesilaos.

When the ship put in here at Elaious, I dreamed that I read the verses of Homer in which he relates the catalogue of the Achaeans, and I invited the Achaeans to board the ship, since it was large enough for all. When I awoke with a start (for a shuddering came over me), I attributed the dream to the slowness and length of the voyage, since apparitions of the dead make no impression on those who travel in haste. Because I wished to be advised about the meaning of the dream (for the wind has not yet allowed our sailing), I have disembarked here. While walking, as you know, I encountered you first, and we are now talking about Protesilaos. We shall also converse about the catalogue of the heroes, for you say that we shall do so, and “cataloguing them on the ship” would mean that those who have compiled the story about them would then embark.

Although Gibbon does not develop the metaphor of “the Bible of the ancients,” I wish, however, to highlight its evocative power in conjunction with his religious conceptualization of reading and study of Homer. I suggest that this collocation at least partially exemplifies one way in which the importance of Homer in the ancient world has been communicated to students of early Christianity, even though it is not clear to me that this was Gibbon’s purpose. The collocation frames Homer as a text with which it is possible for ancients to have a relationship quite analogous to ways in which the Jewish and Christian scriptures function for their communities of belief. It is “Bible” in the sense of a text that carries the potential both for actualization in the lives of readers and for providing experiential access to the divine.

The article on “Greece” in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* asserts, “With regard to religion it is sufficient to refer to the judgment of Herodotus, that it was Homer and Hesiod who were the authors of the Greek theogony. . . It is a commonplace that Homer was the Bible of the Greeks.”⁸ This statement is not developed further and clearly lacks the evocative character of Gibbon’s memoir. Rather, it effects an imprecise equivalence between Homer and the Bible in the area of what could be called “doctrine” or the defining content of religious thought.⁹ Here we find another aspect of the religious valence of the metaphor, namely, the potential of the text to inform the tenets of religion.

Only two years later, the ancient historian J. B. Bury assails the comparison and its religious implications. He writes,

We must remember that the Homeric poems were never supposed to be the word of God. It has been said that Homer was the Bible of the Greeks. The remark exactly misses the truth. The Greeks fortunately had no Bible, and this fact was both an expression and an important condition of their freedom. Homer’s poems were secular, not religious, and it may be noted

The two “accounts” share a similar merging of experience with the text of Homer, that is, an actualization of Homer in the here and now. Moreover, both locate this experience as an early stage in entering into an intimate relationship with the hero, in one case Protesilaos (seen in the dialogue as the true authority in matters Homeric), the other case the poet Homer himself. On language of religious devotion, intimacy, and initiation in relation to the poetic tradition, see Gregory Nagy, “Prologue” in *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (trans. and ed. Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen Bradshaw Aitken; SBLWGRW 1: Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), xxii–xxxv; and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean, “Jesus as Cult Hero in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Philostratus’s Heroikos: Religion and Cultural Identity in the Third Century C.E.* (ed. Ellen Bradshaw Aitken and Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean; SBLWGRW 6; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 195–218

⁸ “Greece” in *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th edition; 1911), citing Herodotus *Hist.* 2.53.1.

⁹ A similar statement appears earlier in William Smith, *A History of Greece* (London: John Murray, 1889), 39–40, at the opening of his discussion of the poems of Homer: “The Iliad and the Odyssey were the Greek Bible. They were the ultimate standard of appeal on all matters of religious doctrine and early history.”

that they are freer from immorality and savagery than sacred books that one could mention. Their authority was immense; but it was not binding like the authority of a sacred book, and so Homeric criticism was never hampered like Biblical criticism.¹⁰

Although we may question Bury's distinction between "religious" and "secular," his antipathy to religion is unmistakable. Important dimensions of the comparison remain apparent, however, even as Bury rejects it. "Bible" here signals a text with religious potency, "binding" authority for religious adherents, and the ability to communicate the divine ("the word of God"). Bury's criticism of the comparison nonetheless indicates dimensions of its scholarly valence and how "Homer" has been comprehended in conversation with early Christian scholarship.

I would acknowledge that at this point my case is largely circumstantial inasmuch as I have not yet been able to find specific uses of this comparison in early Christian scholarship. It is striking, however, that the statement appears in general discussions of Greece and Greek literature, whether as an undisputed commonplace or as a view to be rejected, in the historical period when critical scholarship is in its initial stages of considering the Hellenistic context for the New Testament and early Christianity. Gibbon, as one of the most prominent earlier Anglophone writers on the ancient world may be one of the channels for the appearance of the comparison at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. The extensive writings of the early Christian historian Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) deserve closer examination to see both how he employs Homer in his reconstruction of ancient Christianity and how he represents Homer. As a foundational figure in European and North American scholarship, Harnack defines many of the trajectories for teaching and research that are still influential today. My experience, moreover, is that the metaphor remains active in teaching and discussion about the ancient Mediterranean for students of early Christianity. I would contend also that the purpose of using the metaphor is to render the phenomenon of Homer interpretable to those outside the fields of classical scholarship. The comparison says, in other words, that Homer occupied the cultural and religious space that the Bible occupies and that Homer was apprehended in ways similar to the ways in which Jewish and Christian scripture is read. It attempts to find an appropriate characterization for the prestige and authority of Homer in the ancient world. Its explanatory thrust is directed not to the biblical texts but rather to the status of the Homeric poems. The inadequacy of the comparison resides in its lack of specificity and overreaching assumptions about the "Bible." It fails, for example, to recognize the fluidity of the concept and content of canon or the range of interpretive stances with regard to the authority of the Bible for determining doctrine and ethics. It obscures, furthermore, questions of the interaction of text, performance, and devotees, as well as the activity of the text within communities. To indicate its inadequacies, however, is not to deny the intellectual work of the metaphor in establishing a horizon of Homer within biblical and theological scholarship.

¹⁰ J. B. Bury, *A History of Freedom of Thought* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 24.

The comparison between Homer and the Bible enters somewhat differently into discussions of establishment of text, formation of canon, and allegorical interpretation.¹¹ In these cases, the comparison functions less to explain the prestige of Homer and more to depict in detail shared or cognate practices. For example, a recent volume edited by Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa and entitled *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World*¹² examines the ancient notions of canon or foundational texts with reference to Homer and the Greek literary tradition, the Septuagint, and the New Testament. Finkelberg herself utilizes the metaphor of Homer as the Bible of the Greek to discuss the process of the codification of Homer in relation to the formation of the *polis*. In particular, she points to the incorporation of interpretation into the text of Homer, “As a result, like the Bible and some other ancient corpora, Homer’s became a manifold text, which carried within itself both the original message and its re-interpretation in the vein of later values.”¹³ In a section labeled, “The Bible of the Greeks,” she goes on to describe the prestige of the Homeric poems in the public life of the city and in ancient education, “This is why the history of the Homeric poems after their fixation in writing is not simply a history of a written text but that of a written text highly privileged in the civilization to which it belonged. In that, its status is closer to the status of the Bible than to that of other works of literature created in ancient Greece.”¹⁴ Here again we may note the explanatory value of the comparison for understanding Homer, located in this instance, however, as part of a comparative discussion of textual fixation and interpretation interacting with community definition and with greater attentiveness to historical specificity.¹⁵

¹¹ By “allegorical interpretation” I mean the ancient “unmarked” sense, namely, the process of elucidating the multiple and sometimes hidden meanings in a text; see the discussion in Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 20–21.

¹² Margalit Finkelberg and Guy G. Stroumsa, eds., *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond: Literary and Religious Canons in the Ancient World* (Jerusalem Studies in Religion and Culture 2; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003).

¹³ Margalit Finkelberg, “Homer as a Foundation Text,” in Finkelberg and Stroumsa, *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond*, 90. I would note, however, the problematic character of Finkelberg’s notion of “original text” both with regard to Homer and the Septuagint; see Gregory Nagy, *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 205–206.

¹⁴ Finkelberg, “Homer as a Foundation Text,” 91.

¹⁵ See, for example, Christopher Marksches’s contribution to the same volume, “The Canon of the New Testament in Antiquity: Some New Horizons for Future Research,” 175–94. I would also note that Robert Lamberton opens his essay in this volume by implicitly problematizing the comparison of any Greek literary corpus with the Bible, “The ancient Greeks might aptly be called people of the world, but decidedly not people of the Book. This is, they reveled in their own words, in their speech acts—and their fascination with these peculiar products of their minds and bodies amounted to an unprecedented narcissism in the use of language. . . . Devoted as they were to their own words, however, the Greeks never collectively embraced or privileged a specific corpus of texts such that they might be thought of as scriptural, as a Book.” See Robert

Similarly, A. A. Long, discussing Stoic readings of Homer, draws a comparison with the Bible,

Homer was the poet for the Greeks. Children learned large parts of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* by heart as part of their primary education. All Greek literature and art, and just about all Greek philosophy, resonate against the background of Homer. Throughout classical antiquity and well into the Roman Empire, Homer held a position in Mediterranean culture that can only be compared with the position the Bible would later occupy. The comparison is important if we are to understand why, from as early as 500 B.C., the status and meaning of Homer were central questions for philosophers. Like the Bible for the Jews, Homer offered the Greeks the foundation of their cultural identity. Such texts, however, can only remain authoritative over centuries of social and conceptual change if they can be brought up to date, so to speak—I mean they must be capable of being given interpretations that suit the circumstances of different epochs.¹⁶

One of the results of drawing this correspondence is to situate the Stoic, allegorical readings of Homer in relation to later Neo-Platonic interpretations and thus also within a realm of practices that are shared by Christians and Jews in antiquity. Although Long focuses on Stoic interpretations, his gestures toward Jewish and Christian practices (for example, to Philo’s interpretations of Torah¹⁷) contribute to an understanding of practices and orientations toward biblical texts. From the perspective of a scholar of early Christianity, I would stress that the explanatory value of the comparison of Homer and the Bible, such as we see in the arguments of Finkelberg and Long, lies as much in what it permits us to say about the Bible as what it indicates about Homer. It indicates a shared field of narrative practices and thus permits historical arguments about their derivation and cultural contexts. The horizon of Homer that it establishes within the study of early Christianity is one that we might characterize more as a horizon of “doing Homer” rather than simply of a literary text. It points us toward questions of the performance of “scripture.”

Gregory Nagy’s discussion of Alexandrian scholarship on Homer makes a more complex but related horizon of Homer available for biblical scholarship. In particular, his arguments concerning Aristarchus and the *koinê* or *koinai* editions of Homer draw in the notion of “scripture” in analogy to the editing of the Septuagint in Alexandria.¹⁸ Nagy is careful to insist,

Lamberton, “The Neoplatonist and their Books,” in Finkelberg and Stroumsa, *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond*, 195.

¹⁶ A. A. Long, “Stoic Readings of Homer,” in *Homer’s Ancient Readers: The Hermeneutics of Greek Epic’s Earliest Exegetes* (ed. Robert Lamberton and John J. Keaney; Magie Classical Publications; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 44.

¹⁷ Long, “Stoic Readings of Homer,” 45.

¹⁸ Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, 187–206; the chapter is entitled, “Homer as ‘scripture.’”

“that the Koine tradition was for Aristarchus simply a “scripture,” not *the* “scripture.” Similarly, the Septuagint was simply *one* of six columns in the six-column format of Origen’s edition of the Hebrew Bible, the Hexapla.”¹⁹ Here, however, we encounter more than comparison; rather the production and prestige of the Septuagint belong to the realm of activity as the Alexandrian traditions of Homeric editing and commentary. In both, Demetrius of Phaleron plays a central role, under Ptolemaic sponsorship, and the aetiology of the Septuagint, as Nagy points out, “reveals some remarkable parallels with the various aetiologies about the genesis of Homeric poetry.”²⁰ I mention this discussion not simply as an instance of the intersection of Homeric scholarship and biblical studies, but to anticipate my own arguments below regarding the Epistle to the Hebrews. That is, I argue that ways of “doing Homer” are available to readers of the Septuagint so as to make possible a heroic configuration of Jesus and the cultivation of political resistance. I locate these methods of reading and performance of “scripture” within streams of traditions derived from Alexandrian scholarship, but not confined there. At this point, I would emphasize how this approach locates the Bible and Homer not as parallel or comparable phenomena, but as ancient fields of shared narrative practice.

Inquiry into the exegetical practices of Philo, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen indicates the extent to which they share methods of reading with interpreters of Homer. Robert Lamberton’s work on the attitudes toward Homer on the part of these three Alexandrian theologians has demonstrated their affinity to Middle Platonic readers of Homer, including Numenius.²¹ Moreover, their methods of reading “scripture,” that is, the Septuagint derive from the same arena of practices as those of other interpreters of Homer. I do not intend to review his discussion here, but rather to make two points. First, the ancient habits of seeing Homer as revelatory of philosophical or divine truth so as, in the hands of early Christian theologians, to point toward the Christian gospel anticipates one strand of the perspective that views Homer as Bible. However critical writers such as Eusebius, Clement, or Origen were of Homer, they nonetheless employed him as part of their notion of *praeparatio evangelica* whereby Homer becomes a prophetic figure and the poems a set of prophetic texts. I would suggest that this ancient approach to Homer intersects conceptually with the characterization of Homer as the Bible of the Greeks explored above.²² The form of this comparison that functions to explain or

¹⁹ Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, 195.

²⁰ Nagy, *Poetry as Performance*, 196.

²¹ Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 44–82.

²² See the introduction to Finkelberg and Stroumsa, *Homer, the Bible, and Beyond*, p. 2–3; the editors there quote Walter Burkert’s discussion of the conceptual connections between the Hebrew Bible and Homer, “Until well into the eighteenth century, the Hebrew Bible naturally stood next to the Greek classics, and the existence of cross-connections did not present any problems. Jephtha’s daughter and Iphigenia were interchangeable models even in the realm of opera” (Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influences on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992], p. 1; ET of *Die*

establish the prestige of Homer evokes, as we saw, the potential of religious meaning and experience. Such an emphasis shares with the ancient perspective the regard for Homer as a revelatory text, through which “truth” is signified. Although modern uses of the comparison do not conflate with a Jewish or Christian understanding of “salvation history” the religious meaning of Homer thus apprehended, in both cases Homer possesses a similar status within the religious and intellectual project. Both emphasize the role of Homer as a speaker of religious and philosophical truth; both privilege the authorial voice of Homer and mythically instantiate Homer as an oracular figure.

The second point I would make is that the ancient habits of interpreting Homer are multidimensional. They are interested in the meaning or actualization of Homer in multiple arenas of human activity: ethics, cosmology, medicine, agriculture, athletics, cult practice—to name only a few.²³ In this respect, they direct our attention beyond concerns with literary production and authorial activity to a larger context of social interactions. In order to understand the ancient practices of interpreting Homer it is necessary to consider the multiple ways in which meaning is made, memory is held, and society constituted. Consideration of performance, understood holistically and including the practices of interpretation, looks at the interaction of narrative, cult, and ethic.²⁴ The ancient interpreters of Homer, because of their holistic understanding of how either a cosmological myth in Homer or specific verses are actualized, remind us to attend to these various dimensions in our examination of “doing Homer” in antiquity.

The multiple dimensions of “doing Homer” or of *mimesis* are largely ignored in the recent work of Dennis R. MacDonald. In a series of publications, MacDonald has argued that various early Christian texts (the Gospel of Mark; the Acts of the Apostles, the apocryphal *Acts*

orientalisierende Epoche in der griechischen Religion und Literatur [Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse 1; Heidelberg, 1984]). See also Walter Burkert, *Babylon, Memphis, Persepolis: Eastern Contexts of Greek Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 21.

²³ See Gregory Nagy, “The Library of Pergamon as a Classical Model,” in *Pergamon, Citadel of the Gods: Archaeological Record, Literary Description and Religious Development* (ed. Helmut Koester; HTS 46; Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1998), 188–93. Philostratus’s *Heroikos*, along with much of the literature of the Second Sophistic, provides extensive evidence of the multidimensional interpretive possibilities of Homer; see Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean and Ellen B. Aitken, trans. and eds., “Introduction,” in *Flavius Philostratus: Heroikos* (SBLWGRW 1: Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), lx–lxxvi.

²⁴ See, for example, Ellen Bradshaw Aitken, *Jesus’ Death in Early Christian Memory: The Poetics of the Passion* (NTOA/StUNT 53; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; Fribourg; Academic Press, 2004).

of Andrew) “imitate Homer.”²⁵ By this characterization he means that the Homeric poems provide for the author a literary model for the writing of a new Christian story. In arguing for an intertextual relationship between Homer and any one of the early Christian texts he considers, MacDonald looks chiefly for borrowed motifs and parallel plot elements. Literary imitation, however, is determined by six criteria, according to MacDonald’s argument: accessibility, analogy, density, order, distinctiveness, and interpretability.²⁶ “Accessibility” refers to the availability of the model text to the author; “analogy” locates the “proposed Homeric parallels within a tradition of imitations of the same model,”²⁷ with particular concern for the frequency of imitation of specific plot elements. “Density” considers the accumulation of “weighty similarities” between the two texts, whereas “order” examines the sequence of parallels. Similarities are further specified in terms of the presence of the same “rarities” in the two texts, that is, distinctive words or expressions within suspected parallels; this is the criterion of “distinctiveness.” The final criterion, “interpretability” or “intelligibility” attends to the differences between texts as “evidence of emulation”; in other words, the imitative text should make sense of or add perspective (“transvaluation”) to the imitated text.²⁸ On the basis of these criteria, MacDonald has argued, for example, that the Gospel of Mark should be considered “a prose epic modeled largely after the *Odyssey* and the ending of the *Iliad*.”²⁹ The differences in genre are not of concern to MacDonald, since he proposes that we learn more about the composition of the Gospel of Mark by examining the ways in which it imitates specific texts of

²⁵ Dennis Ronald MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and The Acts of Andrew* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000); and Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003); see also the essays in Dennis R. MacDonald, ed., *Mimesis and Intertextuality in Antiquity and Christianity* (Studies in Antiquity and Christianity: Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 2001), particularly MacDonald’s “Tobit and the *Odyssey*,” 11–40; and George W. E. Nickelsburg, “Tobit, Genesis, and the *Odyssey*: A Complex Web of Intertextuality,” 41–55. Much the same approach is employed in Michael J. Gilmour’s discussion of the “hints of Homer” in Luke 16:19–31, appendix A in his *The Significance of Parallels between 2 Peter and Other Early Christian Literature* (Academica Biblica 10; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 137–44.

²⁶ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 8; rephrased from his earlier *Christianizing Homer*, 302, where he lists five criteria: density and order, explanatory value, accessibility, analogy, and motivation.

²⁷ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 8.

²⁸ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 8–9.

²⁹ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 3.

quite different genre.³⁰ (I would note in passing that MacDonald does not appear to understand genre in terms of social practices of communication.)

For the most part, MacDonald's analysis focuses on the texts themselves, as the latter four criteria would indicate. He looks beyond the texts when he thinks about accessibility and analogy. Here, however, he emphasizes the ancient practices of literary *aemulatio*, begun as a component of education and characterizing much of the writing from the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The prominence of the Homeric poems both in ancient education and as a foundation for literary works is thus used to MacDonald's argument, and the early Christian works he analyses take their place among other "transvaluative hypertexts" of antiquity.³¹ I would emphasize here the extent to which MacDonald's analytical framework is limited to a model of literary and authorial imitation.

I do not wish at this time to embark upon a detailed critique of the parallels and borrowings that MacDonald adduces for his analysis of the Gospel of Mark, the Acts of the Apostles, or *The Acts of Andrew*.³² For our purposes, it is more productive to focus on larger issues, particularly the notion of "Homer" and of "imitating Homer" within MacDonald's discussion. Homer is, for him, solely a literary entity, consisting of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the epics are available as good stories for literary emulation. It is not so much that the epics possess a high degree of fixity for MacDonald, though they do, but that the question of fixity is not relevant because his argument eschews discussion of tradition and performance. The relationship is between one literary product and another, on a model of literary imitation and interpretation. MacDonald's notion of *mimesis* is, in my view, impoverished compared to an elaboration of *mimesis* in relation to performance traditions in antiquity.³³ Thus "imitating Homer" is confined to the realm of authorial production, without consideration of the dynamic of community practices. This foreshortening of perspective means, for example, that MacDonald's discussion of the writing of the Gospel of Mark does not take into account ritual practices as a compositional matrix.³⁴ It also means that his understanding of literary *aemulatio* is not developed with regard to the larger context of Homeric practices in antiquity, even in the first

³⁰ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 3.

³¹ MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics*, 2.

³² See Robert J. Rabel's detailed review of *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* in the *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* on line, BMCR 00.09.16. See also Jennifer K. Berenson Maclean's review of MacDonald's *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles*, forthcoming in *CBQ*.

³³ See Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 44–45.

³⁴ In contrast see Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 27; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 2000), who argues for an initiatory or baptismal matrix for the development of the Gospel of Mark.

century C.E. Another result of MacDonald's literary framework is there appears to be little place for "reenactment," not only as an alternative model for the relationship between texts, but more importantly as a way of understanding the actualization of tradition more broadly in ethic, cult, social organization, or cosmology. It is thus in marked contrast to the multidimensional understanding of Homer apparent in the ancient habits of interpreting Homer. MacDonald's work is primarily concerned with the question of textual production in early Christianity and with how intertextual analysis helps us to understand composition. A more comprehensive consideration of Homeric horizons in early Christianity may have more to contribute to an understanding of the development of early Christian communities, the dynamics of authority as located in text, person, and practice, and their relation to a larger social world.

The Epistle to the Hebrews and the Doing of Homer

I turn now to my own attempt to establish an early Christian Homerizon within a specific first-century C.E. text, the Epistle to the Hebrews. I suggest here a way of understanding the "doing of Homer" in early Christian communities that attends to the practices available within their cultural repertoire. Instead of focusing on literary imitation, in the narrow sense of the word, I examine the appropriation of methods of reading and interpretation, the configurations of heroic character, and the cultivation of an ethos with religious-political dimensions. Here the three terms of the paper's subtitle—decoy, direction, and doxology—come into play to indicate key features of the poetics of "doing Homer" in this period. As I hope to show, decoy is an important dimension both of the doing of Homer in Hebrews and of the *ethos* promoted by this text. Direction, moreover, is a characteristic of the methods of reading employed, inasmuch as they direct a response toward engagement with a divine figure. Doxology signals the concern for proper cultic practice both present in the text and an aspect of the behavior cultivated by it.

The Epistle to the Hebrews has been characterized as "the most elegant and sophisticated, and perhaps the most enigmatic, text of first-century Christianity."³⁵ It is a text that calls upon the resourcefulness and versatility of its hearers and readers, certainly in the modern period, and I suspect it did so also for its ancient audiences. Although the specific content of the ethical instruction in Hebrews is one of the enigmas of the text, we can recognize the text's concern to exhort its audience with such appeals as "let us hold fast to the confession" (Heb 4:14) and "let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1). Hebrews is best understood as "homiletical," that is, utilizing many of the rhetorical conventions of the hellenistic Jewish sermon,³⁶ and indeed it characterizes itself not as a letter but as a "word of exhortation" (λόγος

³⁵ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (ed. Helmut Koester; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1.

³⁶ On the homiletic character of Hebrews, see Lawrence Wills, "The Form of the Sermon in Hellenistic Judaism and Early Christianity," *HTR* 77 (1984): 280–83; C. Clifton Black, "The Rhetorical Form of the Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian Sermon: A Response to Lawrence Wills [77:277–299 1984]" *HTR* 81 (1988): 1–18; Harold W. Attridge, "Paraenesis in a homily

παρακλήσεως Heb 13:22). Thus the set of questions that I wish to engage, by means of understanding the doing of Homer in this text, centers upon the investigation of how Hebrews instructs its audience and in particular how the text of Hebrews seeks to cultivate the ethos or character of the audience. It is, in other words, an exploration into the formation of character as it is situated in community and as that character is shaped by habits of reading, interpretation, the integration of suffering, political resistance, and compassion.

What I am presenting to you is taken from my recent work, which attempts to interpret Hebrews as a response to the Roman imperial ideology of the Flavian rulers, principally Vespasian and Titus, in the 70s and 80s of the first century as that ideology was displayed in the city of Rome.³⁷ I am arguing that the character, ethos, and habits that Hebrews seeks to cultivate in its audience are aimed enabling them to sustain community and negotiate their way in the political climate and ideology of Flavian Rome. More broadly, I am interested in the question of community formation in early Christianity as this takes place through the performance of narrative, the practice of ritual, and the cultivation of character and lifestyle. I am concerned with how texts and the traditions that contribute to the texts that we have function to constitute community along particular lines. I thus view a text like Hebrews as a venture in shaping and sustaining community, one of many analogous ventures among groups that were in one way or another shaping their lives around the memory of Jesus during the first and second centuries.

I propose here to attend first to what Hebrews has to say about “instruction,” its appropriate time, and its relationship to suffering as a way of establishing the explicit framework for the shaping of a community ethos.³⁸ I turn them to the ways in which instruction is practiced

(λόγος παρακλήσεως),” *Semeia* 50 (1990): 211–26. See also George W. MacRae, “Heavenly Temple and Eschatology in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Semeia* 12 (1978): 179–99. Hebrews characterizes itself as a λόγος παρακλήσεως (“word of exhortation”) at 13:22; see Attridge, *Hebrews*, 14, 408, who points out that this designation is used in Acts 13:15 for Paul’s synagogue address in Psidian Antioch. More recently, David A. deSilva accepts the position that Hebrews is a sermon, but one that makes significant use of the conventions of hellenistic epideictic rhetoric; see deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle “To the Hebrews”* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 58, 514.

³⁷ Ellen B. Aitken, “Portraying the Temple in Stone and Text: The Arch of Titus and the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *Religious Texts and Material Contexts* (ed. Jacob Neusner and James F. Strange; Buffalo: State University of New York Press, 2001), 73–88; repr. in *Sewanee Theological Review* 45 (2002): 135–51, and in *Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights* (ed. Gabriella Gelardini; Biblical Interpretation Series 75; Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 131–48.

³⁸ Ellen B. Aitken, “Wily, Wise, and Worldly: Instruction and the Formation of Character in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” in *The Changing Face of Judaism, Christianity and Other Greco-Roman Religions in Antiquity* (ed. Ian Henderson and Gerbern S. Oegema; Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit, Studien 2; Studies in Christianity and Judaism 10; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus and Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2005), forthcoming.

in and through the text, particularly in terms of the ways to locate one's identity through the scriptures of Israel. The next step is to delineate the qualities central to the ethos Hebrews seeks to cultivate, qualities of resourcefulness and versatility combined with singleness of focus in a multiplicitous world, and to see how these qualities are integral to the method of scriptural interpretation promoted in Hebrews, as well as to the appropriation of imperial ideology in the development of Hebrews' understanding of Jesus. This step entails consideration of the Flavian context of Hebrews and leads to discussion of how the qualities of resourcefulness and versatility are themselves politically charged in this period. Finally, I shall connect the cultivation of versatility to the ethic of solidarity within the community that Hebrews advocates both in its explicit ethical exhortations and in its portrayal of the relationship between Jesus and the audience. This allows us to see both the strategies of community formation at work in Hebrews and the distinguishing features of this attempt at sustaining community.

One of the notable features of Hebrews is the prevalence of scriptural quotations throughout the discourse, combined with scriptural paraphrase and allusion. As is the case with most early Christian writings, the quotations are from or closely related to the Septuagint. Hebrews is concerned throughout with making passages speak through a divine voice in order to portray the saving activity of Jesus and the proper shaping of community life in response. Thus, what we see in Hebrews is the constant actualization of scriptural texts to describe a present reality and to indicate appropriate avenues of reenactment. To set Hebrews in context, it is important to recognize that the method and style of scriptural interpretation in Hebrews has affinities with what biblical scholars have typically labeled an Alexandrian method. That is, Hebrews's handling of scripture has been judged similar to that found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria and not unrelated to what is seen later in Clement and Origen.³⁹ In particular, the "allegorization" of the rituals of the Israelite tabernacle, based on Leviticus 16, and the interest in the exemplary figures of scripture (especially Moses, Melchizedek, and the catalogue of scriptural heroes in Hebrews 11) have been analyzed in relation to Philo's handling of similar material. One of the principles governing Hebrews's interpretation of scripture is a contrast between earthly "shadows" or "sketches" and heavenly realities (e.g., Heb 8:5; 9:23); what is "real" or "true" is distinct from the forms that are perceptible. Consequently, the question of Hebrews's Platonism arises, especially as it pertains to the method of interpreting scripture

³⁹ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 29 for a general review of scholarship on the relation of Hebrews to Philo; the chief proponent of dependence upon is Ceslas Spicq, "Le philonisme de l'Épître aux Hébreux," *RB* (1949): 542–72; 57 (1950): 212–42; and "Alexandrisms dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," *RB* 58 (1951): 481–502. For a critical evaluation of the question, see Ronald H. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle the Hebrews* (ALGHJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 1970); see also L. Kalyan K. Dey, *The Intermediary World and Patterns of Perfection in Philo and Hebrews* (SBLDS 25; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975).

through this contrast.⁴⁰ In this respect too, Hebrews is seen as possessing affinities with Philo or at least with methods of scriptural interpretation employed in a Hellenistic Jewish milieu. In my view, although Hebrews is most likely not directly dependent upon Philo, it is fair to identify its methods of reading scripture as belonging to the same set of interpretive practices that we find in Philo and other Alexandrian writings. I would not, however, argue for an Alexandrian provenance for the discourse on this basis, since this array of interpretive practices was available in other places, including Rome.⁴¹

For our purposes, there are at least two consequences of this contextualizing of Hebrews. The first is that I would insist that Hebrews's methods of interpretation, along with Philo's, should be examined in relation not only to Hellenistic Jewish practices, but also to ancient practices of Homeric interpretation, including the reading of Homer through a Platonic lens. Or, to put it better, Hellenistic Jewish and early Christian reading practices belong to the same repertoire of cultural practices developed with relation to Homer. Thus, this establishes a horizon of Homer particularly for Hebrews where the "doing of Homer" may be done with the Septuagint. The second consequence pertains to the portrayal of Jesus in Hebrews as the authoritative interpreter of scripture, which I shall examine in more detail below. I propose that this feature is strongly related to the poetics of hero cult and of Homeric interpretation, which configure the hero, including Odysseus, as the authoritative interpreter of the epic tradition. Indeed by the first century C.E. Odysseus's versatility itself, within allegorical reading practices,⁴² permit him to master the multiple meanings of the text and to authorize the right interpretation. In this respect, the configuration of Jesus in Hebrews partakes of the conceptualizations and practices of the Homeric tradition, deployed for the cultivation of character and way of life within the audience.

The cultivation of character in the Hellenistic and Roman world belonged in part to the practices of instruction and *paideia*, "education." Hebrews makes explicit statements about instruction, which focus on the necessity of learning through suffering and hardship, rather than

⁴⁰ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; Garden City: Doubleday, 2001), 98–100.

⁴¹ Within biblical scholarship, discussions of "Alexandrian" methods of interpretation are frequently premised on the later (third century C.E. and beyond) distinctions between Antiochene and Alexandrian theological method; they do not, moreover, take into account differences between Pergamene and Alexandrian schools of interpretation pertinent to Homeric criticism. A question for future research is whether Hebrews's methods of interpreting biblical texts bear affinities to earlier Pergamene habits, more than to Alexandrian.

⁴² Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*, 126, citing Heraclitus *Homeric Allegories*. Similarly, on the interchangeability of voice between poet and hero, see Richard P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), xiv; and Nagy, "Prologue," xxx–xxxv, in discussion of Philostratus *Heroikos*, where the hero Protesilaos becomes the authoritative voice of the epic tradition.

on the social structures or institutions of learning. The emphasis on learning through suffering contrasts with the practices of instruction utilized by the text itself. That is, the practices of instruction at work in Hebrews are grounded in skill in the interpretation of scripture, namely, the scriptures of Israel. This contrast prompts the question about the relationship between learning through suffering and interpretive skill, skill particularly in locating one's identity through the medium of scripture. I propose that one way in which to resolve this contrast is to understand the arts of scriptural interpretation as part of what the audience needs in order successfully to endure suffering and to maintain solidarity with the community. Moreover, as I hope to show, the particular art of interpreting scripture demonstrated by Hebrews is one appropriate to the versatility of character necessary to the endurance of suffering.

We can think of Hebrews as containing two intersecting narratives—one of Jesus' descent from the heavenly realm, his earthly residence, and his return to the celestial temple; the other, modeled on the Exodus and wilderness journey of the people of God, concerned with the progress of the audience, who are enabled through Jesus' death to be perfected (Heb 2:10) and to enter the promised heavenly place of "rest" (Heb 4:9) and into the celestial temple (Heb 10:19). We may then ask where in these narratives Hebrews locates "instruction."

A critical text for understanding the place of instruction in Hebrews is the lengthy quotation of Jer 31:31–34 in Heb 8:8–12.

<8:8> μεμφομένος γὰρ αὐτοὺς λέγει, Ἴδου ἡμέραι ἔρχονται, λέγει κύριος, καὶ συντελέσω ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰούδα διαθήκην καινὴν, <8:9> οὐ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην, ἣν ἐποίησα τοῖς πατέρας αὐτῶν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπιλαβομένου μου τῆς χειρὸς αὐτῶν ἐξαγαγεῖν αὐτοὺς ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου, ὅτι αὐτοὶ οὐκ ἐνέμειναν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ μου, καὶ ἐγὼ ἠμέλησα αὐτῶν, λέγει κύριος· <8:10> ὅτι αὕτη ἡ διαθήκη, ἣν διαθήσομαι τῷ οἴκῳ Ἰσραὴλ μετὰ τὰς ἡμέρας ἐκείνας, λέγει κύριος· διδοὺς νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διάνοιαν αὐτῶν, καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν ἐπιγράψω αὐτούς, καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς εἰς θεὸν, καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μοι εἰς λαόν· <8:11> καὶ οὐ μὴ διδάξωσιν ἕκαστος τὸν πολίτην αὐτοῦ καὶ ἕκαστος τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ λέγων, Γνωθὶ τὸν κύριον, ὅτι πάντες εἰδήσουσίν με ἀπὸ μικροῦ ἕως μεγάλου αὐτῶν, <8:12> ὅτι ἴλεως ἔσομαι ταῖς ἀδικίαις αὐτῶν καὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν αὐτῶν οὐ μὴ μνησθῶ ἔτι.

He [*sc.* God] finds fault with them when he says: The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors, on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; for they did not continue in my covenant, and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord. This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach one another or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least

of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.⁴³

Heb 8:8–12

This quotation functions to introduce the contrast developed in Hebrews 9–10 between the “first” covenant and what Hebrews considers “a new covenant,” established through Jesus’ death. Along with the new covenant, according to Jeremiah, comes knowledge of God throughout the community, along with the end of instruction. I would suggest that indirectly the quotation indicates that instruction, teaching, and insufficient knowledge all belong to the time of journeying into perfection and “rest.” That is, when the community experiences the full rewards of covenant faithfulness and share with Jesus in heavenly glory, then instruction will no longer be necessary, because of the complete internalization of the covenant (“I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts”). Heb 10:12–18, in citing again Jer 31:33, makes this internal inscribing of the covenant the result of Jesus’ work of perfecting and sanctifying the community. Instruction therefore belongs not to heavenly life, but to the present situation of the audience.⁴⁴

Hebrews also uses athletic imagery to speak of the “training” of the community, as is common in discussion of hellenistic instructional practices.⁴⁵ Those who are *teleioi*⁴⁶ are

⁴³ All translations of biblical texts are from the NRSV, unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁴ Hebrews speaks in a variety of ways of the contrast between faithfulness and rebellion; the various exhortations remain faithful or to hold fast (to the confession, the confidence, the hope, etc.) underscore the theme of staying with the community (Heb 10:25), whereas the exhortations not to rebel or to fall away from the community are grounded in the story of the disobedience of the wilderness generation. The parenetic contrast is developed most fully in the quotation of Psalm 95 and its interpretation in Hebrews 3–4.

⁴⁵ Attridge, *Hebrews*, 161.

⁴⁶ In Heb 5:11–6:3, we find explicit discussion of levels of instruction and of what is expected of the inscribed audience. Here the author reproaches the audience for not being where they ought in the process of learning, “for though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God” (Heb 5:12). They need “milk,” rather than “solid food.” This common Hellenistic metaphor for levels of instruction⁴⁶ would appear here to distinguish elementary learners from advanced ones, “neophyte Christians” from “mature Christians,” and the basics of Christian teaching from the more complex teaching taking place in Hebrews itself.⁴⁶ What follows in Heb 6:1–3 supports this dichotomy in that it separates “going on toward perfection” from the “foundation” or “the basic teaching about Christ” which is spelled out as a “repentance from dead works and faith toward God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.” (Heb 6:2). We should note, however, that Hebrews speaks of “solid food” as what is proper for *teleioi* (Heb 5:14) rather than for the *nēpioi* (Heb 5:13). Although this language is found in other instances of reflection upon the educational process (e.g., Philo *Agric.* 9), it may well be an example of

described as “those whose senses (*aisthêtêria*) have been trained (*gegumnasmena*) through habit (*hexis*) to distinguish good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

<5:11> Περί οὗ πολὺς ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος καὶ δυσερμηνευτος λέγειν, ἐπεὶ νωθοὶ γεγονάτε ταῖς ἀκοαῖς. <5:12> καὶ γὰρ ὀφείλοντες εἶναι διδάσκαλοι διὰ τὸν χρόνον, πάλιν χρεῖαν ἔχετε τοῦ διδάσκειν ὑμᾶς τινὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τῆς ἀρχῆς τῶν λογίων τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ γεγονάτε χρεῖαν ἔχοντες γάλακτος [καὶ] οὐ στερεᾶς τροφῆς. <5:13> πᾶς γὰρ ὁ μετέχων γάλακτος ἄπειρος λόγου δικαιοσύνης, νήπιος γάρ ἐστιν· <5:14> τελείων δέ ἐστιν ἡ στερεὰ τροφή, τῶν διὰ τὴν ἔξιν τὰ αἰσθητήρια γεγυμνασμένα ἐχόντων πρὸς διάκρισιν καλοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ.

About this, we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, for those who faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Heb 5:11–14

With the imagery of the gymnasium, it points to an instructional mode that is concerned with the formation of the whole person through the cultivation of one’s habits. Linked culturally to the socialization of the young, such training would ideally result in the ability to function within the reconfigured world of adulthood.⁴⁷ This is “character formation” in the broadest sense, pertaining to the *ethos* of a person within a community. Elsewhere in Hebrews agonistic vocabulary and metaphors are employed to speak of the work in which the community is engaged, as, for example, at Heb 12:1–2, with the image of “running the race (*agôn*).” The

Hebrews’s tendency to use *double entendre*. That is, within the larger conceptual scheme of Hebrews, being *teleioi* is something more than possessing maturity; it designates being perfected, sanctified, entering into the heavenly sanctuary, and completing the journey with Jesus and the community into the promise. The term may be employed proleptically here to designate those who are on their way toward perfection, that is, those who maintain solidarity with Jesus and the community.

⁴⁷ Here recent discussions of asceticism seem to me to provide a useful framework, following Richard Valantasis, that “asceticism may be defined as performances designed to inaugurate an alternative culture, to enable different social relations, and to create a new identity” thus permitting the practitioner “to function within the re-envisioned or re-created world.” Richard Valantasis, “A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism,” in *Asceticism* (ed. Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 548, 550. This definition seeks to avoid conceiving of the ascetic as exotic, but draws instead upon the classical and Hellenistic Greek notion of *askêsis* as exercise, practice, or training in a profession, set of skills (for example, in poetry, the gymnasium, or the military), or a mode of living. The asceticism of the Hellenistic gymnasium aims at cultivating in the ephebes of the city the practices, relationships, and character appropriate to civic culture.

situation of the audience is envisioned in the text as a time of *agôn*, in which they are both learning the practices necessary for reaching the goal and developing the orientations (covenant faithfulness, obedience, solidarity) proper to their heavenly identity as the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Athletic imagery is also employed in another passage where Hebrews reflects on instruction itself:

<12:3> ἀναλογίσασθε γὰρ τὸν τοιαύτην ὑπομεμενηκότα ὑπὸ τῶν ἀμαρτωλῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀντιλογίαν, ἵνα μὴ κάμητε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλυόμενοι. <12:4> Οὕτω μέχρις αἵματος ἀντικατέστητε πρὸς τὴν ἀμαρτίαν ἀνταγωνιζόμενοι. <12:5> καὶ ἐκλέλησθε τῆς παρακλήσεως, ἥτις ὑμῖν ὡς υἱοῖς διαλέγεται Ἰησοῦς, μὴ ὀλιγώρει παιδείας κυρίου μηδὲ ἐκλύου ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἐλεγχόμενος· <12:6> ὃν γὰρ ἀγαπᾷ κύριος παιδεύει, μαστιγοῖ δὲ πάντα υἱὸν ὃν παραδέχεται. <12:7> εἰς παιδείαν ὑπομένετε, ὡς υἱοῖς ὑμῖν προσφέρεται ὁ θεός. τίς γὰρ υἱὸς ὃν οὐ παιδεύει πατήρ; <12:8> εἰ δὲ χωρὶς ἐστε παιδείας ἧς μέτοχοι γεγονάσιν πάντες, ἄρα νόθοι καὶ οὐχ υἱοὶ ἐστε.

Consider him who endured hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted [*antagōnizomenoi*] to the point of shedding your blood. And you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as children—“My child, do not regard lightly the *paideia* of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him: for the Lord disciplines [*paideuō*] those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts.” Endure trials for the sake of *paideia*. God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline [*paideuō*]? If you do not have that *paideia* in which all children share, then you are illegitimate and not his children.”

Heb 12:3–8 (NRSV adapted)

Here again the ethical dimension is foregrounded, since the audience is reminded of their “struggling against (*antagōnizomenoi*) sin” (Heb 12:4), which is linked to Jesus’ endurance of “hostility from sinners” (Heb 12:3). This difficult passage also interprets suffering and hardship within an instructional framework of *paideia*, suggesting that the social experience of instruction is a meaningful organizing principle for this community. *Paideia* here also functions as a criterion of legitimacy for belonging to God’s household.

The instructional *agôn* of the community is undertaken in solidarity with Jesus and by following Jesus’ leadership (e.g., Heb 12:1–3). Hebrews does not speak of Jesus as a teacher but as one who learns. Jesus’ learning and the learning of community go hand in hand.⁴⁸ Heb 5:7–10,

⁴⁸ We should note here that the addressees of Hebrews are named in ways that underscore their solidarity with Jesus, as his siblings, as the brothers and sisters whom Jesus brings to perfection and presents to “Father” upon his return to the celestial realm (Heb 2:11–13). In this same

utilizing traditions of Jesus' passion,⁴⁹ portrays Jesus as one who “although he was a son, learned obedience through what he suffered” (Heb 5:8).

<5:7> ὃς ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις τῆς σαρκὸς αὐτοῦ δεήσεις τε καὶ ἰκετηρίας πρὸς τὸν δυνάμενον
σώζειν αὐτὸν ἐκ θανάτου μετὰ κραυγῆς ἰσχυρᾶς καὶ δακρῦων προσενέγκας καὶ
εἰσακουσθεὶς ἀπὸ τῆς εὐλαβείας, <5:8> καίπερ ὢν υἱὸς, ἔμαθεν ἀφ' ὧν ἔπαθεν τὴν ὑπακοήν,
<5:9> καὶ τελειωθεὶς ἐγένετο πᾶσιν τοῖς ὑπακούουσιν αὐτῷ αἴτιος σωτηρίας αἰωνίου, <5:10>
προσαγορευθεὶς ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀρχιερεὺς κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned [*emathen*] obedience through what he suffered [*epathen*]; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Heb 5:7–10

Here the wordplay between *emathen* and *epathen* engages a common instructional proverb about learning through experience, but is here particularized in terms of Jesus' passion.⁵⁰ It thus focuses the instructional experience on the engagement of suffering with endurance and faithfulness. Suffering, for Jesus, becomes the instructional means for the formation of character here both as “son” and “high priest.” As in Heb 12:3–12, instruction is presented as the interpretive framework for suffering, which suggests that Hebrews, in implicitly encouraging in this fashion, envisions a community with existing instructional practices, perhaps one in which instruction was central to what defined and constituted the community. The author can therefore draw upon these practices not only as a organizing principle for the experience of suffering but also as a strategy for cultivating an ethic of solidarity in suffering within the community.

I would turn now briefly to the question of how the text performs instruction for its audience. Here the skills the text demonstrates and calls upon in terms of the interpretation of scripture are at the forefront. Hebrews is a text challenges its audience consistently to “get” the right message. Its rich texture draws upon the audience's interpretive skills in a variety of ways, requiring—to list a few examples—the ability to follow a complex treatment of a quotation from the scriptures of Israel (as with the exposition of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3–4), the allegorization of Israelite cult practice, familiarity with a scriptural context and tradition around and beyond what

context, Jesus' being perfected through suffering, being tested as his siblings are, and becoming like them in every respect (Heb 2:10–18) underscores the cohesion of the group, as well as Jesus' solidarity with them.

⁴⁹ See Aitken, *Jesus' Death*, 143–47.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Aeschylus *Ag.* 177; Herodotus *Hist.* 1.207; and the discussion in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 152–53.

is specifically quoted (as in the portrayal of Jesus' agonized prayer in Heb 5:7–10),⁵¹ and a capacity for puns and *double entendre*. In other words, inasmuch as successful rhetoric relies upon an audience's ability to "get" and act upon the values that it promotes, Hebrews' ideal audience needs expertise in the art of interpretation.⁵²

The performance of scripture in Hebrews allows us to see how this method of instruction works. A notable feature of the quotation of scripture in Hebrews is that it is consistently placed in the mouth of a divine figure: God, Jesus, or the Spirit. This technique has been described by Harold Attridge as "divine ventriloquism."⁵³ The result is that Hebrews portrays God, Jesus or the Spirit speaking enigmatic utterances that require interpretation. The divine speaker is thus one who possesses expertise in a modality of discourse wherein multiple meanings are possible, but those "in the know" are capable of "getting" the proper and singular meaning. Thus the speaker, through the medium of the enigmatic utterance, tests the mettle of the audience. This is consistent with the function of scripture in Hebrews, particularly the use of Psalm 95 and the story of the Israelites in the wilderness. The audience is put to the test to see if they "get" the "true" meaning for themselves, namely, that by not falling away from the community and thus not being like the ancestors who perish, but rather by holding fast to Jesus, they are able to reach the goal of the journey. Hebrews works with scripture in this way, demonstrating its need for interpretation and instructing its audience in the means of finding the true meaning—by looking to Jesus (Heb 12:2). In particular, Hebrews emphasizes that when the audience "looks to Jesus" they are to see not only his humiliation and shame (Heb 5:7–10), but also his being crowned with glory and honor (Heb 2:9). It is this capacity to recognize Jesus that functions as the guarantee of hope for the audience, hope, that is, for their own entrance into the heavenly realm. *Paideia* then

⁵¹ This portrayal of Jesus' suffering and prayer draws upon a wider psalmic tradition of suffering and vindication (see August Strobel, "Die Psalmengrundlage der Gethsemane-Parallele. Hebr 5:7ff, *ZNW* 45 [1954]: 256), as well as the ways in which the prayer of the righteous person is typically depicted (see Harold Attridge, "'Heard Because of His Reverence' [Heb 5:7], *JBL* 98 [1979]: 91–93). I would also argue that this passage shows familiarity with ways of narrating Jesus' suffering and death, in existence prior to and contributing to the written passion narratives (Aitken, *Jesus' Death*, 143–47).

⁵² This is reflected in the judgment of many modern commentators on Hebrews when they remark that Hebrews aims at an audience with esoteric knowledge and an advanced experience and expertise in Christian tradition and practice. See, for example, Helmut Koester, *Introduction to the New Testament*, vol. 2: *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (2d ed.; New York and Berlin: de Gruyter, 2000), 277.

⁵³ Harold W. Attridge, in a paper for the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Rome, 2001. The idea is developed, although the term "divine ventriloquism" does not appear, in Harold W. Attridge, "Giving Voice to Jesus: Use of the Psalms in the New Testament," in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical, and Artistic Traditions* (ed. Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler; SBL Symposium Series 25; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 108–111.

functions as training in getting the meaning hidden in the midst of suffering and using that meaning as the groundwork for an ethic of solidarity with those who are suffering.

The way in which instruction is performed in Hebrews works then toward the development of a modality of communication and a modality of ethical action in the audience. The modality of communication is demonstrated through the versatility of divine speech as testing the mettle of the audience and in training them in similar ways of reading scripture, through the lens of Jesus' suffering and glory. I suggest that this modality is employed in Hebrews not only as part of the persuasive strategies of this text but also to educate the audience in similar arts of speaking with multiple meaning. The modality of action is cultivated through instruction in the embrace of suffering and the maintaining of solidarity within the community. This embrace of suffering relates to the modality of communication in that it provides the interpretive key for the community and renders them expert in getting the right meaning from scripture.

How, then, does Hebrews characterize the divine way of speaking and how does this indicate the particular ethos that Hebrews seeks to cultivate in the community? By drawing upon, if I may anticipate my conclusions, a tradition of the virtue of versatility and of trickster-like behavior that may also include a degree of suffering. It is well recognized that the opening exordium of Hebrews (1:1–4) announces the main themes of the discourse and paves the way for all that it is follow.⁵⁴

<1:1> Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις
<1:2> ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον
πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας· <1:3> ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτήρ
τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν
τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς, <1:4> τοσοῦτω
κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα.

In many and various ways [*polutropôs*] God, having spoken of old to our ancestors in the prophets, at the end of these days, has spoken to us in a son, whom he has appointed heir of all, through whom also he made the worlds, who, being the radiance of his glory and the exact imprint of his very being, bearing all things by his word of power, having made

⁵⁴ See Attridge, *Hebrews*, 36–37; also Aristotle's definition (*Rhet.*) of an exordium, "The exordium is the beginning of a speech, as the prologue in poetry and the prelude in flute-playing; for all these are beginnings, and as it were a paving the way for what follows. . . . The speaker should say at once whatever he likes, give the key note and then attach the main subject. . . . But in speeches and epic poems the exordia provide a sample of the subject, in order that the hearers may know beforehand what it is about, and that the mind may not be kept in suspense, for that which is undefined leads astray; so then he who puts the beginning, so to say, into the hearer's hand enables him, if he holds fast to it, to follow the story."

purification for sins, took a seat at the right hand of majesty on high, having become as far superior to the angels as he has inherited a name more excellent than they.

Heb 1:1–4⁵⁵

I want to call attention to one aspect of the diction of this dense passage, namely, the use of the adverb *polutropôs* (“in many fashions”) in the first verse. Given its prominence in the exordium, I would suggest that *polutropôs* announces a modality important to Hebrews and to how scripture behaves with Hebrews, just as the adjective from which it is derived, *polutropos*, occupies a similarly prominent place at the opening of the *Odyssey*:

ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πόλλα
πλάνχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσε·
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν,
ἀρνύμενος ἥν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways [*polutropos*], who was driven
far journeys, after he sacked Troy's sacred citadel.

Many were they whose cities he saw, whose minds he learned of,
many the pains he suffered in his spirit on the wide sea,
struggling for his own life and the homecoming of his companions.

(Homer *Odyssey* 1.1–5, trans. Lattimore)

Within the Homeric tradition, *polutropos* is the epithet distinctive to Odysseus, marking him as versatile, protean, and multi-form, as the shapeshifter and trickster. The *Odyssey* announces in its proem that it is a song about the sufferings and travels of the *polutropos* man, the man “of many forms,” but who endured through a steadfast singularity of focus. I suggest that Hebrews similarly announces that it takes as its subject in part the *polutropos* (“multi-form”) journey of the Word of God, now seen most singularly in Jesus.

The trickster-like qualities of Odysseus are what enable him to make his journey home to the kingdom of Ithaca, outwitting his adversaries, overcoming the obstacles placed in his path, and disguising his true identity. For Odysseus to be *polutropos* is the key to his *nostos*, both his journey of return and the story of his journey.⁵⁶ Epic consistently presents Odysseus as speaking in marked speech that requires particular expertise on the part of his hearers in order to receive

⁵⁵ The translation here departs considerably from the NRSV and is informed by that in Attridge, *Hebrews*, 35.

⁵⁶ See Gregory Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

the proper message, to interpret his meaning correctly. He is the “master of multiple meanings,”⁵⁷ his speech is wily, protean, and indirect, testing his audience at every turn.⁵⁸

Being *polutropos* is also what enables Odysseus to survive in adverse circumstances, as an alien, as one deprived of his possessions and status.⁵⁹ Being *polutropos* is thus intricately paired with Odysseus’s sufferings; the trickster and the suffering hero are one. Here we see singularity in the midst of this multiformity, shape-shifting, and disguise. The challenge that Odysseus presents to those who encounter him, god and human alike, upon his return to Ithaca is whether they will, as Nagy has put it, “look beyond the hero’s outer appearance as a debased beggar and . . . recognize his inner reality as a noble king.”⁶⁰ Similarly the riddles in which Odysseus speaks contain a single meaning, “a true message that is hidden amidst a plethora of possible false interpretations.”⁶¹

A number of points of connection with Hebrews are already observable. First, Jesus’ path, as it were, in Hebrews is a journey of departure from the heavenly realm (“made for a while lower than the angels,” Heb 2:9), through a time of debasement, to return to “the right hand of the Father,” to share there in God’s reign and glory. This journey is one that we may characterize as a *nostos*, the return of the hero through trials and labors (even death) to his or her home as a ruler.⁶² In this respect, Jesus’ journey, indeed the journey of God’s speech, and that of Odysseus are comparable, not least in that for both the trials involve extreme suffering, including physical suffering and struggle, debasement and dispossession, before the entrance into their true nobility. Second, God’s versatile or *polutropic* speech in Hebrews calls forth interpretation. In particular, it calls forth singular interpretation, the singularity being defined by Jesus. That is, whenever

⁵⁷ Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 424.

⁵⁸ We may note that Odysseus shares the epithet *polutropos* with the trickster and messenger god Hermes; see *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 1–16) which describes Hermes as “of many shifts (*polutropos*), blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates, one who was soon to show forth wonderful deeds among the gods.”

⁵⁹ See Douglas Frame, *The Myth of Return in Early Greek Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); and Pietro Pucci, *Odysseus Polutropos: Intertextual Readings in the Odyssey and Iliad* (Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 46; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

⁶⁰ Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 425.

⁶¹ Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 426. Gregory Nagy, in his work on the poetics of Greek epic, has also observed that whenever epic quotes Odysseus, he “speaks not in the mode of epic, but rather as a master of multiple meanings, a man of craft whose discourse is described by epic itself as *ainos* (*Od.* 14.508)”; Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 424.

⁶² I have made this argument with more detail in “The Hero in the Epistle to the Hebrews: Jesus as an Ascetic Model,” in *Early Christian Voices: In Texts, Traditions, and Symbols: Essays in Honor of François Bovon* (ed. David Warren, Ann Graham Brock, and David Pao; Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2003), 179–88.

scripture is deployed in Hebrews the prism through which it is interpreted is something to do with Jesus. Jesus becomes the prism through which scripture is refracted, as, for example, in the quotation of psalms in chapters 1 and 2. This is also signaled in the exordium, in that God's speaking polutropically is paired with a presumably more singular speaking "in a son" (Heb 1:1). I do not read this as a contrast or an exclusive periodization of divine revelation, but rather an indication of the interrelation of the two aspects of divine speech.⁶³ Although the verse marks two temporal periods of divine communication, as distinguished by "to our ancestors of old" and "to us," communication "through the prophets" remains a vital resource for the audience, as apparent in Hebrews's frequent quotation of the scriptures of Israel.

I would emphasize at this point that I am not arguing that Hebrews is a Christianizing of the *Odyssey*. That is, unlike MacDonald, I am not arguing for literary emulation. Nor am I saying that Jesus is a Christianized Odysseus; rather the virtues upheld and inculcated in Hebrews are derived from a tradition of which the earliest manifestation is the story of Odysseus. In particular, the characteristic of being *polutropos*, in the centuries between Homer and Hebrews, becomes an important topic of philosophical and political discussion. In other words, the epic tradition and the practices of reenactment and interpretation have established a heroic pattern for a distinctive character for leadership, a particular political capacity, an ethos that combines the qualities of the trickster with those of a hero who undergoes extreme loss, alienation, and debasement. Being versatile and resourceful becomes thus a strategy of survival and a means of holding fast to noble values, such as truth or justice, amid opposition.⁶⁴

We see, for example, the sixth-century poet Theognis of Megara upholding the character of the *polutropos* octopus in training the young man Kurnos in what is necessary for noble leadership in the midst of enemies, although deprived of one's goods and city.⁶⁵ Plato, in the *Lesser Hippias*, presents an extended discussion between Socrates and Hippias on whether

⁶³ Most English translations emphasize a contrast; I would point out, however, that the use of the participle *lalêsas*, may coordinate with the main verb *elalêsas* rather than contrasting with it. There is no *men. . . de* construction, and *palai* is paired not with a temporal construction such as "now."

⁶⁴ I do not mean to suggest that every use of *polutropos* designates this capacity. I would distinguish between "marked" and "unmarked" usages (to use the formalist linguistic terms), where the "marked" usages allude to this heroic tradition, whereas the "unmarked" usages designate more generally what is "diverse," "varied," and "multiple."

⁶⁵ πολύπου ὀργὴν ἴσχε πολυπλόκου, ὃς ποτὶ πέτρι τῇ προσομιλήσει, τοῖος ἰδεῖν ἐράνη. νῦν μὲν τῆδ' ἐφέπου, τοτὲ δ' ἄλλοις χροὰ γίνου. κρέσσων τοι σοφῖ γίνεται ἀτροπίης. "Have the temperament of a complex [*poluplokos*] octopus, who looks like whatever rock with which he is associated. Now be like this; then, at another time, become different in your coloring. I tell you: skill [*sophia*] is better than being not versatile [*atropos*, i.e., the opposite of *polutropos*]." (trans. G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer*, 425). Cf. the heroes of "faith" in Hebrews 11, who endure in similar circumstances.

Achilles or Odysseus is better, a discussion that centers upon whether *polutropos* behavior, as political behavior, can be virtuous and just:⁶⁶

Socrates: “. . . But now what do you say about Achilles and Odysseus? Which do you say is better and in what respect?” . . .

Hippias: “Why I am glad, Socrates, to explain to you still more clearly what I say about these and others also. For I say that Homer made Achilles the bravest man of those who went to Trop, and Nestor the wisest, and Odysseus the wiliest [*polutropôtatos*].

Plato *Lesser Hippias* 364a–c (trans. LCL)

Closer to the time of Hebrews, in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, the topic of being *polutropos* and its advantages for political leaders and for the wise occurs with some frequency. An extended discussions is found in Philo’s treatise *On Joseph*, in which he develops a political reading of the Genesis story so as to promote Joseph as the model of the ideal statesman, piloting the ship of state. Philo writes of Joseph,

οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ μέντοι καὶ χιτῶνα ποικίλον ἀναλαμβάνειν λέγεται· ποικίλον γὰρ πολιτεία καὶ πολύτροπον, μυρίας ὅσας ἐνδεχομένη μεταβόλας, προσώποις, πράγμασιν, αἰτίαις, πράξεων ιδιότησι, καιρῶν καὶ τόπων διαφοραῖς. . . . καὶ τὸν πολιτικὸν ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι τινα πολυειδῆ καὶ πολύμορφον, ἕτερον μὲν κατ’ εἰρήνην, ἕτερον δ’ ἐν πολέμῳ, ἄλλον δὲ ἐπισυνισταμένων ὀλίγων ἢ πολλῶν, τῶν μὲν ὀλίγων εὐτόνωσ κατεξανιστάμενον, μετὰ δὲ πειθοῦς τοῖς πολλοῖς ὀμιλοῦντα, καὶ ὅπου μὲν μετὰ κινδύνου τὸ εἶναι, διὰ τὸ κοινωφελές φθάνοντα τοὺς ἄλλους αὐτουργία, ὅπου δὲ πόνων ἢ σκέψις, ἑτέροις ὑπηρετεῖν ἐξιστάμενον. εἰ μὲντοι τὸ φάναι πιπράσκεσθαι τὸν ἄνθρωπον· ὁ μὲν γὰρ δημοκόπος καὶ δημηγόρος ἀναβὰς ἐπὶ τὸ βῆμα, καθάπερ τὰ πιπρασκόμενα τῶν ἀνδραπόδων, δούλος ἀντ’ ἐλευθέρου γίνεται διὰ τῶν τιμῶν, ἃς δοκεῖ λαμβάνειν, ἀπαχθεὶς ὑπὸ μυρίων δεσποτῶν.

Further, he [Joseph] is quite properly said to assume a coat of varied colors, for political life is a thing varied (*poikilos*) and multiple (*polutropos*), liable to innumerable changes brought about by personalities, circumstances, motives, individualities of conduct, differences in occasions and places. . . . The politician must needs be a man of many sides and many forms. He must be a different man in peace from what he is in war, another man as those who venture to oppose him are few or many, resisting the few with vigorous action but using persuasion in his dealings with the many, and when danger is involved he will, to effect the common good, outstrip all the others in his personal activity, but when the prospect is one of labour merely he will stand aside and leave others to serve him. Again it is rightly said that

⁶⁶ The *Lesser Hippias* demonstrates the awkward ethical questions raised by advocating behavior like Odysseus’s (as when a “just and good person” voluntarily speaks falsehood and does wrong for the sake of justice), and especially whether such behavior is at odds with the value of justice fundamental to the health of the *polis*.

this person is sold, for when the would-be popular orator mounts the platform, like a slave in the market, he comes a slave instead of a free man, and, through the seeming honours which he receives, the captive of a thousand masters.

Philo *On Joseph* 32–36; trans. Colson (LCL) adapted

Philo goes on to emphasize the rhetorical resourcefulness of the ideal politician, but again drawing upon the story of Joseph speaks of the politician as being like “a slave in the market” and “the captive of a thousand masters,” as well as like “the prey of wild beasts,” because of the dangers of vainglory (*Jos.* 35–36). We find here a familiar complex of motifs: the resourcefulness and versatility of the political leader together with reference to the experiences of dispossession and extreme suffering. Joseph serves as a good model for the person who is *polutropos*, not only because of his “coat of many colors,” but because of his resourcefulness (including rhetorical resourcefulness) that enables him to survive through his oppression.⁶⁷

In addition, Cynic and Stoic writers of the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E. extol the example of Odysseus as, to cite a few instances, the prime type of the Stoic citizen of the world (Epictetus⁶⁸), of how much *virtus* one can achieve even amid the greatest of hardships (Horace⁶⁹), of one who reaches his true homeland through countless labors (Seneca,⁷⁰ forced to commit suicide under Nero). Odysseus’s rhetorical skill and his ability to interpret enigmatic speech are upheld as integral part of such ideal political behavior.⁷¹ This tendency among Stoics

⁶⁷ Another important discussion occurs in the *Embassy to Gaius*. Philo reproaches the emperor for adopting the outward appearance of many heroes and demi-gods in his hubristic assumption of divinity. He compares Caligula to Proteus in how he “recast what was nothing but a single body into manifold [*polutropos*] forms. The figure of shape-shifting Proteus appears in relation to epic traditions of being *polutropos*, not least in Odysseus’s own encounter with Proteus, so his presence in this context is hardly surprising. Philo, however, demonstrates his own rhetorical resourcefulness for surviving this sharp criticism of the emperor by advocating instead a different kind of shape-shifting, “And what business had you, Gaius, to take the insignia commonly used to adorn the images of the aforesaid deities? For you should have emulated their virtues!” (*Leg.* 81). It is worth remembering that the *Embassy to Gaius* is itself a response to the violence against the Jews of Alexandria in 40 C.E., and that Philo thus writes here on behalf of a community very much subject to the dominant power. It may not be stretching matters too far to suggest that in the *Embassy to Gaius*, Philo is demonstrating just the political expertise that he advocates in the treatise *On Joseph* and elsewhere.

⁶⁸ Epictetus *Discourses* 1.12.3; 2.24.26; 3.24.13, 18–20; 3.26.33–34; fr. 11.26.

⁶⁹ Horace *Epistles* 1.2.

⁷⁰ Seneca *De constantia sapientis* 2.

⁷¹ On Odysseus (Ulysses) among Cynic and Stoic writers, see W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford: Blackwells, 1954), 122–38. On Odysseus as the interpreter of allegory, see Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian*, 53; this tendency is emphasized among the allegorical interpreters of Homer.

and Cynics of the first century is remarkable when we see it against the background of a dominant penchant among Roman writers to deprecate Odysseus as treacherous, cruel, and deceitful, indeed as everything opposed to sound Roman values. Disparaging Odysseus is especially pronounced among the Augustan writers, such as Virgil, for whom promoting of Aeneas as the progenitor of the *gens Iulia*, the imperial family, entailed the vilification of Odysseus, his “Greek” enemy.⁷² That is, disparaging Odysseus goes along with the very cornerstone of Augustan imperial theology. It is striking, therefore, that the poet Ovid, in exile in the far reaches of the Black Sea, having incurred imperial wrath, extols Odysseus as one who suffered greatly under divine anger and yearned with great tears to see once again his wife and the smoke of his homeland.⁷³

My point here is that, around the time of the writing of Hebrews, Odyssean behavior and the resourcefulness and versatility of this polutropic hero function as arenas for the discussion of political survival and endurance in adverse circumstances and especially for voices of opposition to the prevailing imperial theology. With the reassertion and reshaping of Augustan theology in Flavian Rome, these tensions persist, and thus alert us to the possibility that Hebrews may be entering a related arena of discussion when it speaks of divine speech as *polutropos*. That is to say, we can situate the character of versatility that Hebrews seeks to cultivate within the range of political capabilities and behaviors discussed and cultivated in Flavian Rome. The question remains: Does the cultivation of this versatility in Hebrews and through its theology permit not only the skilled interpretation of scripture through the prism of Jesus but also the skilled interpretation and appropriation of Flavian ideology? I would argue that it does.

The celebration of the Roman victory in Judea in the First Jewish War, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem, has been characterized, from the Roman perspective, as the “Flavian Actium.” Just as the Battle of Actium in 31 B.C.E. provided one of the chief ideological foundations for Augustan rule, the Flavians employed the Judean victory as the chief propagandistic tool for promoting their consolidation of imperial rule, following the civil wars of 69 C.E., as an assertion of imperial order out of factionalism.⁷⁴ The subjugation of Judea stood at

⁷² Dueling genealogies for the Latin kings was also at work; an earlier genealogy made the Latin kings the descendants of Odysseus and Circe, whereas by the fourth century BCE a competing genealogy asserted their descent from Aeneas, a genealogy that was revived by Augustus in his imperial theology. See Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme*, 128–37.

⁷³ Ovid *Tristia* 1.2.9; *Epistles* 1.3.33–34.

⁷⁴ See G. C. Picard, *Les trophées romains. Contribution à l'histoire de la religion et de l'art triomphal de Rome* (Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome 187; Paris: Boccard, 1957) 343–44, 359–60, who argues that Jerusalem became the “Flavian Actium.” See also Michael Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen* (Beiträge zur Erschließung hellenistischer und kaiserzeitlicher Skulptur und Architektur; Mainz: Phillip von Zabern, 1983) 101, on the use of

the center of Flavian propaganda. and the Flavian rulers exploited the one-time event of the triumph as the defining point for the public display of their rule, especially in Rome itself:⁷⁵ in 71 the celebration of the triumph with prayers, procession, executions, and sacrifices; Vespasian's building of the Temple of Peace, dedicated in 75, next to the Roman Forum and in which were housed the spoils from the Jerusalem temple; in 81, following Titus's death,⁷⁶ the erection of the Arch of Titus at the highest point of the Via Sacra,⁷⁷ and it appears, another, earlier arch in the Circus Maximus, erected during the lifetime of Titus, probably ca. 80,⁷⁸ which made explicit mention in its dedicatory inscription of Titus's conquest of Judea and Jerusalem, "following the precepts of his father."⁷⁹ The inscription on this earlier arch highlights an

this victory in Flavian propaganda and on the specific association of the triumph and the apotheosis of Titus.

⁷⁵ On the increased political dimension of the triumph in the principate, see Michael McCormick, *Eternal Victory: Triumphal Rulership in Late Antiquity, Byzantium, and the Early Medieval West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) 20. McCormick also points out (p. 21) that by such vehicles as monuments, vestments, coinage, titles, and religious rites, an emperor could amplify the victory celebrated in the triumph. On the relationship between triumphs and other Roman *pompae*, see Harriet I. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) 107–109. Flower (p. 109) argues that both the triumphal procession and the funeral procession were "overtly political in content, even and especially in representing relationships with the gods." In reading the triumphal rite as political, my work is also informed by that of Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

⁷⁶ Titus died in September 81; coins from 81/82 depict him as *divus* (see *British Museum Catalogue of Coins of the Roman Empire*, 2. plate 69, 9; and Peter N. Schulten, *Die Typologie der römischen Konsekrationsprägungen* [Frankfurt am Main: Numismatischer Verlag Schulten, 1979] 66–67), thus establishing a *terminus post quem* for the arch. Pfanner (*Der Titusbogen*, 91–92) argues for a date very early in the reign of Domitian as the most likely time for the erection of the arch.

⁷⁷ On the primary function of the triumphal arch, from the first century C.E. onwards, as an instrument of imperial propaganda, for advertising imperial events and honors, see Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen*, 97.

⁷⁸ This arch has not been found, but may be one of at least four triumphal arches, known from coins, reliefs, and mosaics, in the Circus Maximus, and perhaps the triple arch depicted on the Forma Urbis Romae (the Marble Plan); on this hypothesis, see Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen*, 98. L. Richardson (*A Topographic Dictionary of Ancient Rome* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992] 30) accepts this location and suggests that it was most likely located at the rounded end of the Circus Maximus.

⁷⁹ *CIL* 6.944; and Hans Ulrich Instinsky, "Der Ruhm des Titus," *Philologus* 97 (1948): 370–71. The text of the inscription reads, "Senatus Populusque Romanus Imp. Tito Caesari Divi Vespasiani F. Vespasian(o) Augusto Pontif. Max. Trib. Pot. X Imp. XVII (C)os VIII PP Principi Suo quod praeceptis patr(is) consiliisq(ue) et auspiciis gentem Iudaeorum domuit et urbem

important dimension of the Flavian ideology, namely, the celebration of succession from victorious father to victorious son, precisely that dimension of rule which was missing in the Julian-Claudian period and most notably in the year of the four emperors (69 C.E.), during which the disputes over succession led to civil war.⁸⁰ We may now add to this list⁸¹ the building of the Flavian amphitheater, the Colosseum, “from the spoils of war.”⁸²

The Arch of Titus on the Via Sacra depicts the triumphal procession, including, on the north passageway reliefs, Titus and Vespasian in a four-horse chariot, accompanied by lictors, and on the facing relief, the weighty spoils from the Temple. The center of the arch’s coffered ceiling shows the apotheosis of Titus. This arch is the visual depiction of the triumph celebrated some ten years earlier.⁸³

Josephus provides a detailed account of this triumph in Book 7 of the *Jewish War* (7.123–162). I would note a few key elements: the procession from outside the sacred boundary of Rome through the city to the Capitoline Temple, a procession with sacrifices, the display of subjugated prisoners and of the spoils from the temple, the triumphators, father and son, clothed as Jupiter Optimus Maximus, with crown and scepter, followed by their freedpersons. The triumph concludes with the execution of the most prominent prisoners⁸⁴ of war and sacrifices in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. Although the procession was the most visible, public aspect of the

Hierusolyman omnibus ante se ducibus regibus gentibus aut frustra petitam aut omnino intemptatam delevit.” See Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen*, 98.

⁸⁰This dimension is also apparent in the various literary descriptions of the triumph. Josephus (*J.W.* 7.121) remarks that although the Senate had voted a triumph each to Vespasian and Titus, they nonetheless decided to celebrate a common triumph. Suetonius (*Lives of the Caesars* 8.6) mentions that Titus shared in his father’s triumph. Cassius Dio, writing around the beginning of the third century C.E., emphasizes the importance of the succession in his account of Vespasian’s acclamation and the celebration of the triumph. According to Cassius Dio (*Roman History*, epitome of Book 65.12), upon his acclamation Vespasian is so overcome by emotion that he is able only to say, “My successor shall be my son or no one at all” (ἐμὲ μὲν υἱὸς διαδέξεται, ἢ οὐδεὶς ἄλλος).

⁸¹ Although the coin issues depicting *Judaea Capta* or *Judaea Devicta* would have spread across the empire, most of the public display was in the city of Rome itself; Smallwood, *Jews under Roman Rule*, 329.

⁸² See Geza Alföldy, “Eine Bauinschrift aus dem Colosseum,” *ZPE* 109 (1995): 195–226.

⁸³ The dedicatory inscription on this arch is simpler than that on the arch in the Circus Maximus; it reads “Senatus Populusque Romanus Divo Tito Divi Vespasiani F. Vespasiano Augusto. Pfanner argues (*Der Titusbogen*) that the straightforward message of this inscription emphasizes the divinization of Titus over the celebration of the Judean victory per se, although the depiction of the triumph on the arch functions ideologically to support the Senate’s divinization of the emperor.

⁸⁴ See also Otto Michel, “Studien zu Josephus: Simon Bar Giora,” *NTS* 14 (1968): 407–408.

triumph, the triumph was at its heart concerned with the return of the general or emperor to the temple of the Roman gods and with acclaiming the epiphany of the god in the person of the triumphator.⁸⁵ In other words, the apotheosis of Titus depicted on the ceiling of the Arch has already been displayed—in his lifetime—on the day of the triumph. The Arch celebrates his consecration.⁸⁶ The triumph with its attendant monuments was probably one of the most prominent features in the religio-political landscape of Flavian Rome.

The depiction of the Son, Jesus, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, is expressed chiefly in the words of the psalms. Nevertheless it makes use of many of the motifs found in the Roman triumph, especially as it was celebrated by the Flavians. First, the principal themes of Hebrews 1 and 2 are the return of the Son, Jesus, to the heavenly realm, to his throne on the right hand of the Father, where he shares in the reign of the Father. Through the use of Psalm 2, 9, and 110, Hebrews brings to the forefront of its depiction of Jesus issues of sonship, succession, and rule⁸⁷—issues central to Flavian propaganda. Moreover, this depiction includes elements of the triumph: the crown, scepter, glory and honor,⁸⁸ the visible subjugation of enemies, and the

⁸⁵ See Versnel, *Triumphus*, 83. Versnel's consideration of the triumph includes an examination of two opposing arguments, namely, whether the triumphator was seen as Jupiter or as an ancient Roman king; he concludes (p. 92) that the vesture of the triumphator with the *ornatus Iovis*, the *corona Etrusca*, and red lead, along with the acclamation *triumphe*, characterize the triumphator as the representative of Jupiter, but inasmuch as some of these aspects, notably the *ornatus Iovis*, were originally associated with the king, the royal and the divine are merged in the triumphator.

⁸⁶ Pfanner (*Der Titusbogen*, 99) stresses that the arch's iconographic program not only honors a divinized emperor, but also "grounds and demonstrates his divinity." The arch can thus be described as a "consecration monument" ("Konsekrationsmonument"). According to this reading, the lower registers depict Titus's earthly triumph as the foundation of his divine position. The ceiling coffer with the apotheosis of Titus is thus the heavenly consummation of this earthly triumph, supported by the portrayal of the guarantees of this status: the personified figures of the virtue, honor, and victory of the Augusti. Moreover, on the basis of a reference in Cassiodorus (*Variae* 10.30.1), it is possible that the arch was crowned with a pair of elephants or, more likely, a quadriga drawn by elephants; Pfanner interprets this feature as showing the heavenly triumph of Titus, carried into heaven on the quadriga, and corresponding to the quadriga drawn by horses in his earthly triumph. See Pfanner, *Der Titusbogen*, 3, 99.

⁸⁷ On the importance to the triumph of holding the *imperium*, see Versnel, *Triumphus*, 185–94. On these themes in Hebrews, see Kenneth Schenck, "Keeping his Appointment: Creation and Enthronement in Hebrews," *JSNT* 66 (1997): 91–117, who argues that the focus of sonship in Hebrews is on the son's enthronement in heaven, where he fulfills his divine appointment.

⁸⁸ That the triumph and its associated monuments honor the emperors is without doubt. A more specific connection may be suggested by the presence of the figure of *Honos* (i.e., personified honor) accompanying Titus's chariot on the inner relief of the Arch of Titus. This figure, however, is also interpreted as the Genius of the Roman people; Inez Scott Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion in Roman Art* (MAAR 22; Rome: American Academy, 1955), 147; Pfanner (*Der Titusbogen*, 69–70) discusses the identification closely, concluding that the figure is more likely

triumphant journey of return to the temple (in this case the heavenly temple, as becomes clear in Heb 9:11–12). Jesus is, in my view, depicted in Hebrews as the triumphator in procession to the temple. The text displays the apotheosis of Jesus, rather than the apotheosis of Titus, but both are portrayed as the son who rightfully rules alongside his father.

Second, in Hebrews the Son is also the ultimate high priest (Heb 4:14–10), offering himself. In the Roman triumph the triumphator is also the sacrificer, the priest of Jupiter Capitolinus, who makes the concluding sacrifice of the triumph.⁸⁹ Like Jesus in Hebrews, Titus was both son and priest, but Hebrews fills this image with allusions to a story of Jesus' death and his offering of himself (Heb 5:7–10; 9:12, 26, 10:1–18; 13:12–13).⁹⁰ I would suggest here that Hebrews is critiquing the ideology of divine rule expressed in the triumphal sacrifices, but doing so indirectly by means of typological reflection on the Yom Kippur rituals and the inadequacy of the high priests in the earthly sanctuary. Thus the typological argument about Levitical sacrifices becomes a means of resistance to the Roman imperial ideology.

Third, the monumental and ritual expressions of the Flavian triumph all feature the spoils from the Jerusalem temple. These, as much as the glory of the son, become the vehicle of the ideology.⁹¹ Likewise with the list of splendid items from the tabernacle Hebrews is verbally displaying the furnishings within its own triumphal statement.

to be *Honos*. On the increased tendency to include allegorical and personified figures in monumental art at the end of the first century C.E., see Ryberg, *Rites of the State Religion*, 97.

⁸⁹ Ryberg (*Rites of the State Religion*, 141) argues that at the heart of the triumph lies the repayment of vows made to Jupiter Capitolinus made prior to the general's departure on military campaign. Thus the concluding sacrifice, amid all the opportunities of display and glorification, is the performance of these vows, the returning to the gods of what was promised. Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus offers himself in accordance with God's will; by placing the quotation of Ps 40:6–8 on the lips of Jesus, the author of Hebrews portrays Jesus as saying, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God (in the scroll of the book, it is written of me)." Despite some differences, both the Roman triumph and Hebrews understand the sacrifice as fulfilling the demands of the relationship with the divine.

⁹⁰ On traditions of Jesus' passion in Hebrews, see Martin Dibelius, "Gethsemane," in Dibelius, *Botschaft und Geschichte*, vol. 1: *Zur Evangelienforschung* (ed. Günther Bornkamm; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1953), 258–71; Strobel, "Die Psalmengrundlage," 256; Paul Andriessen, "Agonisse de la mort dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," *NRTh* 96 (1974): 2986–91; Helmut Koester, "'Outside the Camp': Hebrews 13:9–14," *HTR* 55 (1962): 300; Aitken, *Jesus' Death*, 130–64.

⁹¹ Ryberg (*Rites of the State Religion*, 146), surveying the iconography associated with triumphs, posits that the Arch of Titus is unusual in that it does not portray the triumphators sacrificing, a scene that might be expected as the companion relief to the triumphal processional. She suggests that the depiction of the golden objects from the Jerusalem temple was chosen instead because of the great interest that they attracted in Rome.

Like the Flavians, Hebrews makes use of the “sanctuary” of Israel to promote its message of true rule. Hebrews does so by turning to the wilderness tabernacle⁹² and making it the earthly shadow of the heavenly realities, pointing out its inadequacies, and showing its abolition (Heb 12:9) through the self-offering of Jesus. We may thus be more precise and say that Hebrews makes use of both the earthly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary (the true one) to promote its message of true and proper rule, just as the Flavians made use of both the Jerusalem temple and the Capitoline temple to promote theirs.⁹³ Thus, one of the many strategies of Hebrews is to take the elements of the imperial triumph and place them in the service of its Christology. This Christology, following the opening chapters of Hebrews, is ultimately one of divine rule, in which the enthroned son shares in the reign of the father in the heaven, with his enemies subject to him (Heb 1:13). In the Roman triumph, the triumphator’s freedpersons followed him in procession; so too in Hebrews, those whom Jesus has liberated from those held in slavery their whole lives by “the fear of death” (Heb 2:15) are to follow after Jesus in his victorious journey.⁹⁴

<2:14> ἐπεὶ οὖν τὰ παιδιά κεκοινωνήκεν αἵματος καὶ σαρκός, καὶ αὐτὸς παραπλησίως μετέσχευ τῶν αὐτῶν, ἵνα διὰ τοῦ θανάτου καταργήσῃ τὸν τὸ κράτος ἔχοντα τοῦ θανάτου, τοῦτ' ἔστιν τὸν διάβολον, <2:15> καὶ ἀπαλλάξῃ τούτους, ὅσοι φόβῳ θανάτου διὰ παντὸς τοῦ ζῆν ἔνοχοι ἦσαν δουλείας.

Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death.

Heb 2:14–15

In Hebrews, however, the triumph belongs to the suffering, versatile hero and to those who recognize his true nobility in midst of his debasement.

The skill in interpreting scripture that Hebrews seeks to cultivate in its audience is here required in order to apprehend the reappropriation of Flavian triumphal theology as a story of Jesus’ triumph. That is, the audience needs to be doubly skilled in reading scripture and in the reading the monumental messages surrounding them. The cultivation of a *polutropos*, resourceful, versatile character, skilled in decoding enigmas and skilled in double-speech as a political virtue is thus what allows the audience, to the extent that they “get” the message to

⁹² Perhaps precisely because the Jerusalem temple is no longer standing.

⁹³ The transfer of the Jerusalem temple tax into the *fiscus Iudaicus*, paid to the Capitoline temple and gods implies that, as a result of Roman victory, proper tribute is due not to the god of the Jerusalem temple, but instead to the Capitoline gods.

⁹⁴ Harold W. Attridge, “Liberating Death’s Captives: Reconsideration of an Early Christian Myth,” in *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World: In Honor of James M. Robinson* (ed. James E. Goehring et al.; Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1990) 103–115.

negotiate their way in Flavian Rome and maintain their solidarity among the followers of Jesus. For the singular message of Hebrews' appropriation of the Flavian triumph and of its manifold interpretations of the scriptures of Israel is that solidarity with one another, as with Jesus, in suffering is the key to entering the promised land of rest. Thus in the end the cultivation of versatility involves a shape-shifting exercise of compassion. In one of the few exhortations with specific content in Hebrews, the audience is bidden:

<13:1> Ἡ φιλαδελφία μενέτω. <13:2> τῆς φιλοξενίας μὴ ἐπιλανθάνεσθε, διὰ ταύτης γὰρ ἔλαθόν τινες ξενίσαντες ἀγγέλους. <13:3> μιμνήσκεσθε τῶν δεσμίων ὡς συνδεδεμένοι, τῶν κακουχομένων ὡς καὶ αὐτοὶ ὄντες ἐν σώματι.

Let *philadelphia* [love among the community] continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were in their body. (NRSV, adapted)

Heb 13:1–3, NRSV adapted

They are reminded of Jesus' boundary-crossing ability in his suffering, "who suffered outside the city gate," and told to "go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured."

<13:12> διὸ καὶ Ἰησοῦς, ἵνα ἀγίασῃ διὰ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος τὸν λαόν, ἔξω τῆς πύλης ἔπαθεν. <13:13> τοίνυν ἔξερχώμεθα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔξω τῆς παρεμβολῆς τὸν ὀνειδισμόν αὐτοῦ φέροντες·

Therefore Jesus also suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood. Let us then go to him outside the camp and bear the abuse he endured.

Heb 13:12–13

This is ultimately, in Hebrews, the means of maintaining solidarity with Jesus and thus of entering, as part of his train of freedpersons, into the heavenly temple.

The cultivation of versatility entails not only instruction in the interpretation of scripture, but also the development of the ability to enter into the place of the other and to embrace the suffering found there. Hebrews draws upon the practices of "instruction" as one of the frameworks for understanding and integrating suffering, but it also draws upon a framework of communal memory for the audience:

<10:32> Ἀναμιμνήσκεσθε δὲ τὰς πρότερον ἡμέρας, ἐν αἷς φωτισθέντες πολλὴν ἄθλησιν ὑπεμείνατε παθημάτων, <10:33> τοῦτο μὲν ὀνειδισμοῖς τε καὶ θλίψεσιν θεατριζόμενοι, τοῦτο δὲ κοινωνοὶ τῶν οὕτως ἀναστρεφομένων γενηθέντες. <10:34> καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δεσμίοις

συνεπαθήσατε καὶ τὴν ἀρπαγὴν τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ὑμῶν μετὰ χαρᾶς προσεδέξασθε
γινώσκοντες ἔχειν ἑαυτοὺς κρείττονα ὑπαρξιν καὶ μένουσαν.

But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners [*koinônoi*] with those so treated. For you had compassion [*sumpathêô*] on those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting.

Heb 10:32–34

That is, this “memory” of shared suffering which Hebrews puts forward for its audience functions in the text as a framework to shape their apprehension and negotiation of their present experience. It is precisely the character of the *polutropos* hero who suffers much, knowing that he possesses something better, that Hebrews seeks to cultivate as the means for the community to endure whatever some of their members may be suffering. And it is, moreover, the practice of versatility and resourcefulness as a modality of speech and interpretation and a modality of ethical action that, from Hebrews’ perspective, allows them to hold fast to Jesus, as an octopus holds fast to a rock amid the battering waves.

Let me draw the strands of my argument together. Hebrews is training its audience in the arts of reading: the arts of reading scripture, the arts of reading the signs (and monuments) of the city and of *imperium*, the art of developing double readings and political versatility. In doing so, it is participating in existing Roman and Hellenistic Jewish practices (e.g., Philo) of resistance to *imperium*, particularly those that draw upon practices of “doing Homer” as a mode of interpretation. We might also say that Hebrews is instructing its audience in the “arts of resistance,” to borrow James C. Scott’s phrase,⁹⁵ and the arts of negotiating political space, arts that are appropriate to status as subjects of imperial rule. But it is, I would say, doing so out of a repertoire of the arts of resistance and reading already developed in the Roman world. The ability to decoy oneself and to recognize “truth” decoyed in the surrounding landscape of texts and monuments is a central element in this repertoire. Yet, Hebrews also indicates the interpretive principle, namely, “looking to Jesus.” In doing so it directs the audience both toward a hidden singularity amid the multiplicity of decoyed messages and toward an immediacy of relationship with a heroic figure who embodies the interpretive performance of scripture and thus inculcates a pattern of political-religious behavior. The consequence of the audience’s capacity for decoy and for direction, as presented in the text, is survival. It is, moreover, survival as a community participating in the cultic worship proper to its existence, both earthly and heavenly (see Heb 10:25; 12:22). “Doing Homer” in this instance, with regard to the scriptures of Israel and the

⁹⁵ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

figure of Jesus, results in more than the production of a literary text. It issues rather in the cultivation of a set of practices for negotiating social, political, and religious identity.

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